The NOODLE

Open up and say AHHHH!!!

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Welcome to the November 2026 edition of *The Noodle*, written and published by members of the Florida Youth Council! In this issue of *The Noodle*, our members share their perspectives, personal experiences, interests, and opinions. We hope you enjoy learning more about our members and discovering their unique stories in this edition of *The Noodle*!

CURRENT MEMBERS

Jakel Baker
Shevie Barnes
Olivia Burka
Nigel Diaz
Zeta Gil
Leah Gorman
JJ Humphrey
James Kuhlman
Anthony LaCava
Sydney Lanier
Vanessa Muniz-Pellicer
Michelle Sandiford
Miles Stewart
Josue Tapia
Lilibeth Carrion Vega
Serena Wetmore



A coffee mug on a table in front of a view of a great lake.

November brings opportunities for members of the Florida Youth Council to reflect on their experiences, share their perspectives, and continue building connections with one another. Through their writing, members explore topics that matter to them, celebrate their interests, and speak up about issues that affect their lives. This issue of The Noodle highlights their thoughts, experiences, and stories in their own words.

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Want to write for *The Noodle*? Talk to a member of the Florida Youth Council about how to become a member!

How Not Looking "Disabled" Can Affect a Person Living With a Rare Disease

By **Olivia Burka**

Having a rare disability is hard enough, but dealing with social norms only makes it more difficult. Meeting people's expectations of what we "should" look like affects social situations, educational settings, and medical experiences. Social situations are affected by having a rare, hard to see disability in a couple of ways. For example, there are times that a disabled person is invited to events at venues that are not accessible. This can add confusion or disappointment to the disabled and embarrassment to the person who did the inviting. At other times, someone may not be invited to an event, especially as children, because people assume the disabled person cannot or doesn't want to participate. The correct action would be to ask. Having a rare disability often brings medical personnel having no knowledge of your disorder(s). The symptoms may be invisible to the naked eye, and without the knowledge needed, medical personnel may not believe you have the condition(s). The result may end up being not treating your symptoms or suggesting the symptoms are in your head. Finally, an invisible disability can affect your educational experiences. As a very young student, occasionally teachers don't believe your accommodations are needed and attempt to bypass them. As an older student, many teachers are not supportive of the accommodations and verbalize that in the "real world" accommodations will not be met. Society needs to stop judging degrees of disability by physical cues. At any age, disabled people want to be shown respect and empathy in social situations, medical instances and in educational settings.

Networking and Advocacy

A Day at the Capitol

By **JJ Humphrey**

Florida Youth Council leader JJ attended Epilepsy Day at the Florida State Capitol to support the Epilepsy Alliance of Florida! 💜
During the event, JJ advocated for legislation requiring not only teachers, but also other school staff members, to receive seizure first aid training, with refresher training every three years. This initiative aims to improve seizure awareness, preparedness, and student safety in schools.



Banquet at The Governors Club

Arrr You Ready for Ancient City Con? Pirates Ahoy!

By **Serena Wetmore**



Ancient City Con! Arrrr

Florida Youth Council member Serena had an amazing time at Ancient City Con! She enjoyed meeting new people, networking, seeing incredible characters, and taking in all the fun the convention had to offer. Check out a little glimpse into her experience!

Skies the Limit for this Non-Bender!

By **James Kuhlman**

In the *Avatar* series, we have been introduced to many different disabled characters that show that despite their disability, they don't let it take them down or make them feel powerless. The first disabled character that we're introduced to is a testament to that statement. Teo is a naturally born gifted mechanic that built his own wheelchair to help him navigate around due to the fact he is paralyzed from the waist down. The wheelchair that he built is no normal wheelchair though. He built his wheelchair with wings that allow him to fly and glide all over place. In the series, Teo has helped solve many problems that team *Avatar* has faced. Not only is he naturally talented, he is extremely fast in his wheelchair and he can easily fly at the same pace as Aang when he's on his glider. Teo is a true testament to the saying "Don't judge a book by its cover!"



Soaring through the skies with creativity and determination!

Event Recap

Florida Youth Council October Quarterly Meeting

The Florida Youth Council's October face-to-face meeting established new goals and priorities while providing valuable education on the legislative process, including how lobbying works and how a bill becomes law.



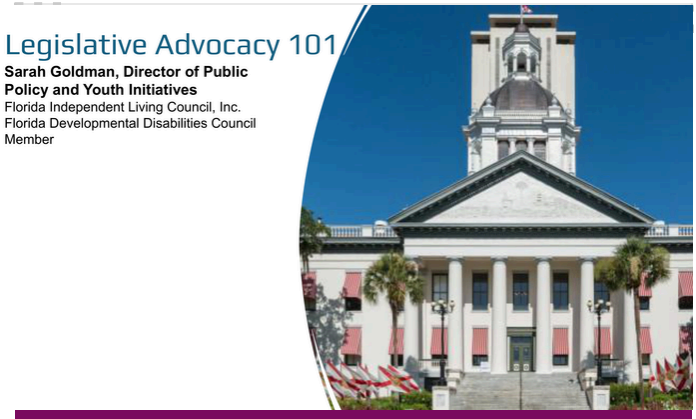
Costume fun at the face-to-face



Costume fun at the face-to-face



Wisdom and stories from alumni



Legislative training from an expert

Legislative Advocacy 101. Sarah Goldman, Director of Public Policy and Youth Initiatives, Florida Independent Living Council, Inc.; Florida Developmental Disabilities Council Member.

"Now I'm starting to understand why getting a bill passed takes so long!"

To Be Able to Socialize

Creative Solutions

By **Serena Wetmore**

As young people with disabilities it is important for us to be able to socialize. Often this is difficult to accomplish due to mobility or other barriers. For many of us that means going to school or religious activities, but it can also mean socializing in public places.

I recently went out to a concert in a very small venue with several friends. Two of us needed mobility aids, specifically some kind of wheeled chair. I was able to take my wheelchair, but my friend could not take his scooter because it would not fit in our other friend's car. He came up with a creative solution of using one of those little wheeled stools like you see in a doctor's office. I had to admire his ingenuity.

Having a disability myself, I notice more ADA and compliance issues than many people. However, sometimes you must be creative to go out into public. They did have a ramped entrance, but using his stool, it was clearly a challenge to get inside. I didn't really know how to help since he tends to want to be as independent as possible, which I respect.

We found seats in the front row for the concert and saved them so our other friends could go get refreshments. At least we were all able to hang out together. The concert was way too loud for me, so I accommodated myself by wearing earplugs inside of my soundproof headphones. We both brought metal straws from home to help us with drinking beverages because not every place has straws which bend.

It was nice to be able to sit in the front and see the stage clearly, but at some point, the dance floor right in front of us started filling up with people which made it impossible to see the band. Instead of getting upset, I told myself they were all just having a good time. I liked that it was a small venue, because it made me feel more involved and part of everything. One of the band members even came down into the crowd and joined in the dancing. I enjoyed being able to meet and talk with some of the band.

Generally, I had a great time, though I got tired and left a little early. Even though everything wasn't perfect, I guess it never is for people with, or without, disabilities. At least I was able to go, and on my way out I saw a sign that said "No Ableism," which made me feel welcome and that made the whole night worthwhile.

Member Spotlight

Member Spotlight: JJ Humphrey



JJ Humphrey Youth Council lead

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

What made you join the Florida Youth Council?

“I joined the Florida Youth Council to be a voice for the voiceless, honor my Papa’s legacy, and make a real difference in Florida—not just through awareness, but through social change and legislation.”

What has changed for you since you joined?

“Since joining the Florida Youth Council, my confidence has grown, my connections have expanded, and I’ve gained a deeper understanding of the disability community and how legislation works. I’ve also developed an even greater passion for disability advocacy and experienced exciting successes in my acting career, many of which began with opportunities and connections through The Family Café.”

What would you tell a young person thinking about applying?

“I would tell any young person to go for it and apply! The Florida Youth Council is a life-changing opportunity that helps you grow in confidence, build valuable social and advocacy skills, and gain knowledge and experiences that can make a lasting difference in your life and your community.”

To Be Able to Socialize

Fears to Conquer

By **Miles Stewart**

Everyone has their own fears to conquer, just like every other living being. Mine is the fear of heights. Like every other human being, I will now explain why I am afraid of heights in the first place.

Whenever I start to look down at a high place, I start to fear what might happen if I fall, my breath becomes cautious and I start imagining the worst-case scenario in my mind. It gets worse when the thing that I am grabbing starts to shake, cause then that tells me that it is unstable and I start clenching. It is one of many fears that I have, but it seems to be the greatest obstacle I need to conquer. I can't be afraid of heights forever and even then it might become difficult for me to do specific activities with my friends like, bungee jumping, or mountain climbing. This fear also comes from me thinking negatively.

I sometimes have a habit of thinking about the worst-case scenario so I can find ways to avoid it. While this can be helpful at times, it has led to me thinking negatively and leading to me being too afraid to think. This is why I am always so anxious to try something new, since I always think I would fail right away. Which is why I must train myself to conquer this fear. Thanks to the help of my family, I am positive that I will be able to look forward instead of looking down.



Creative Corner

by **Jakel Baker**

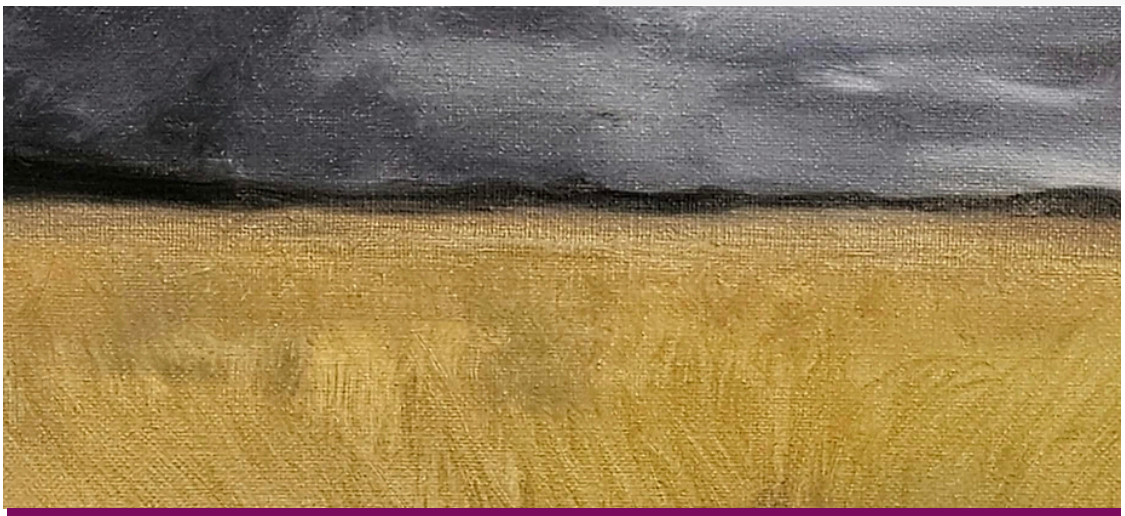
Poetry, artwork, and photography by members of the Florida Youth Council.



Blue Pot



Quiet Currents



After the Storm

Policy Watch

Accessible Voting in Congress

H.R. 10700

Accessible Voting Act of 2026

The bill proposes improving accessible polling places and ballot drop boxes, expanding access to assistive voting technology, reducing barriers caused by long lines, and making election websites more accessible. It also aims to protect voting rights for people under guardianship by preventing guardianship alone from automatically disqualifying someone from voting.

STATUS

Bill status

Introduced on October 1, 2026, the bill was referred to the House Committee on House Administration. As of October 26, it has not passed Congress or become law.

SPONSOR

Bill sponsor

The Accessible Voting Act of 2026 was introduced by Representative Mary Gay Scanlon.

ACT

What Can You Do?

Share real experiences. With permission, share stories from people with disabilities who have encountered inaccessible polling places.

What are your thoughts on this?

Join the Council

How Do I Become Part of The Florida Youth Council?

The Florida Youth Council is a group of youth between the ages of 15 and 17 and emerging leaders between the ages of 18 and 30 with disabilities or special health care needs who live in Florida. The Florida Youth Council is all about getting youth and emerging leaders involved in self-advocacy, peer mentoring, and other activities that will improve the quality of life for youth and emerging leaders with disabilities in Florida. The program empowers youth and emerging leaders to decide what issues are important to their generation, to discuss those issues in their state and local communities, and to develop strategies to address them. We are seeking a group of enthusiastic, motivated youth and emerging leaders to participate. If you would like to take a leadership role in advocating for youth and emerging leaders in Florida, please visit The Florida Youth Council website. The program is open to application year-round. We hope to hear from you soon!

www.floridayouthcouncil.org

The Family Café

The Florida Youth Council

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The Noodle is written and published by the members of The Florida Youth Council.